

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 2045

FOR EUR/EE SCHMIDT FROM DCM FROWICK

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: CZ, CSCE, US
SUBJECT: OFFICIAL - INFORMAL

1. SUMMARY: DURING LENGTHY AND ANIMATED CONVERSATION WITH SENATOR MCGOVERN, VASIL BILAK, THE SECOND MAN IN THE CZECHOSLOVAK COMMUNIST PARTY, CRITICIZED U.S. HUMAN RIGHTS POSITION, BUT INTIMATED THAT GOC MIGHT SHOW SOME FLEXIBILITY ABOUT NEGOTIATING COMPENSATION FOR U.S. CLAIMANTS. ON OTHER MATTERS, THE SENATOR ARGUED FOR BETTER TREATMENT OF FOREIGN JOURNALISTS AND CZECHOSLOVAK SIDE MENTIONED INTEREST IN REACHING BILATERAL EXCHANGES AGREEMENT. END SUMMARY.

2. VASIL BILAK RECEIVED THE SENATOR AT THE FEDERAL ASSEMBLY JULY 14 IN HIS CAPACITY AS A MEMBER OF THAT BODY'S PRESIDUM. AFTER A GENERAL DISCUSSION OF EAST-WEST RELATIONS AND OF THE CURRENT STRAIN IN SOVIET-AMERICAN TIES, BILAK DENOUNCED THE ADMINISTRATION'S HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY AND DISMISSED THE CZECH DISSIDENTS AS "TROTSKYITES AND FANATICS." SENATOR MCGOVERN COUNTERED WITH EXAMPLES OF THE SALUBRIOUS EFFECTS OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL CRITICISM. BILAK WAS UNCONVINCED.

E. CLAIMS/GOLD: BILAK TOOK THE POSITION THAT THE RETURN OF THE GOLD WAS OUR "MORAL DUTY." BUT BILAK BECAME FAR
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MORE CONCILIATORY AND APPEARED FOR THE MOMENT TO BE TURNING THE DISCUSSION INTO A NEGOTIATION AFTER SENATOR MCGOVERN ENCOURAGED BILAK TO VIEW THE PROBLEM AS A "PRACTICAL, POLITICAL ONE," WHICH MIGHT BE SOLVED WITH A SOMEWHAT HIGHER OFFER BY THE CZECHOSLOVAK SIDE, PERHAPS 50 PERCENT OF THE VALUE OF THE CLAIMS. BILAK, REFLECTING ON THE SUGGESTION, REPLIED THAT THE MATTER WAS CERTAINLY

IN THE REALM OF COMPROMISE, BUT SHORTLY THEREAFTER
DILUTED HIS TALK OF COMPROMISE BY SUGGESTING THAT THE
TERM OF PAYMENT BE UPPED FROM THIRTEEN YEARS SPECIFIED IN
1974 AGREEMENT AND SOMEHOW LINKED TO TRADE. HE ALSO REMINDED THE
SENATOR THAT TWO PREVIOUS "COMMITMENTS" HAD BEEN BROKEN AFTER
THE AGREEMENTS HAD BEEN INITIALED BY THE U.S. NEGOTIATORS. HE
CONCLUDED ON AN UPBEAT NOTE BY STATING THAT THE INITIATIVE SHOULD
COME FROM THE U.S. SINCE HE COULD GIVE NO ANSWER
"TODAY". THIS STATEMENT SEEMINGLY APPLIED EQUALLY TO THE
SENATOR'S FIFTY PERCENT PROPOSAL AND TO HIS OFFER TO BE
HELPFUL IN ENCOURAGING SOME OF HIS COLLEAGUES IN THE
SENATE TO SUPPORT SUCH A SETTLEMENT SHOULD BILAK WANT
HIS HELP. AT DINNER THAT EVENING ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER
JABLONSKY WHO HAD BEEN VERY QUICKLY BRIEFED ON THE
MCGOVERN-BILAK SESSION BY ZANTOVSKY, ONE OF HIS
SUBORDINATES, TOOK PAINS TO TELL AMBASSADOR THAT, IN
EFFECT, BILAK'S WORDS SHOULD NOT BE READ AS SUGGESTING
THERE IS ANY REAL GIVE IN GOC POSITION. HOWEVER, DURING
MEETING WITH JABLONSKY, JULY 20, ON OUR CSCE DEMARCHE
ON THE SOVIET TRIALS, HE TOLD AMBASSADOR THAT AFTER A
FULL BRIEFING HE WAS DELIGHTED TO LEARN THAT BILAK HAD
BEEN ENCOURAGING A SETTLEMENT BY HIS INDICATION THAT
GOC HAD SOME FLEXIBILITY AND HOPED THAT MCGOVERN
REFLECTED AN EQUALLY STRONG U.S. DESIRE TO REACH A
SETTLEMENT. HE REPEATED BILAK'S HOPE THAT HE WOULD
HAVE A PROPOSAL SOON.
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4. JOURNALISTS: THE SENATOR ARGUED ELOQUENTLY FOR
BETTER COOPERATION WITH JOURNALISTS, BILLING HIS
PRESENTATION AS "FREE POLITICAL ADVICE" WHICH FIDEL
CASTRO HAD EARLIER HEEDED AND PROFITED BY. BILAK
APPEARED INTERESTED BUT UNMOVED AND COUNTERED WITH
NUMEROUS COMPLAINTS ABOUT CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S BAD PRESS.

5. EXCHANGES AGREEMENT: ALTHOUGH THE EXCHANGES AGREE-
MENT WAS MENTIONED DURING BILAK MEETING ONLY IN PASSING
AS ONE "SMALL STEP" TOWARDS IMPROVING RELATIONS, AT
DINNER GIVEN BY NATIONAL FRONT DEPUTY CHAIRMAN TRAVNICEK
IT GOT MORE ATTENTION. TRAVNICEK EXPRESSED HIS STRONG
SUPPORT FOR EARLY IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROPOSED U.S.-
CZECHOSLOVAK AGREEMENT.
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